

Luxury pet hotels

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There are some people who lay down \$43 a night for a roadside motel while travelling on the road. That's also a nightly rate to put your dog up at one of a bunch of the new luxury pet hotels that are popping up around North America.

The PetSafe Village in Knoxville, Tennessee charges \$42.95 a night for a doggy stay in their luxury suite. For that, your dog gets a spacious extra large suite with outdoor space and playtime without the nuisance of other dogs. The owner gets to watch their pet on a webcam and can even phone in and leave a message for their dog to listen to. There's also a tuck-in service and nightly treat. Cats get spacious "condos" and play houses. All animals get 24-hour monitoring, exercise, grooming and any other special requirements if required.



Oh, and they sleep on Kuranda beds, which are a cot-like pet bed that is supposed to be orthopedic and helps "eliminate ugly elbow calluses" that dogs often get on their elbows. Who knew that doggy elbow calluses were a source of concern? Well, in this age of the spoiled pet, such things are more of a priority than ever, so it makes sense that along with spas, daycares, various therapies, bakeries and pet food marts, we'd enter the world of luxury "hotels" intended exclusively for pets. Forget human hotels that are merely pet friendly. These hotels are intended for fur-covered guests only, and they're more than just dressed-up kennels.

Disney's even gotten in on the act. The Walt Disney World Resort in Florida is the Ritz Carlton of dog hotels, with 50,000 sq. ft. of space exclusively for pampered dog use. The Best Friends Pet Care Resort is scheduled to open August 27, allowing visitors to Disney World the opportunity to drop their fur kids at their own resort before heading to one of 33 Disney human-friendly hotels.

The dog resort includes 10,000 sq. ft. of covered runs and play area, as well as grooming facilities, VIP suites with televisions, raised beds and a private outdoor space. The resort has the capacity to comfortably accommodate 270 dogs, but the kitties aren't to be left out. There's a Kitty City condo complex that has room for 30 cats to bask in catnip inside their own two or four-room condo.

Meanwhile, over in California, the Barkley Pet Hotel & Day Spa is about to open a 22,000 sq. ft. facility, complete with leather furniture, webcams for spying, and "pawdicures," which we can only hope don't include two coats of nail polish.

The industry is in full swing north of the border, too.

Take a look at Vancouver's Rex Dog Hotel on Terminal Avenue. The four-year-old hotel and spa is almost always at capacity with 50 to 60 doggy guests enjoying the luxurious décor of the 10,000 sq. ft. space. Dogs roam freely throughout the many TV lounges with cushy beds, computerized water park outside and sleeping areas - one for big guys, one for little guys. It's the only form of segregation at the hotel. Dogs are not put in individual suites or kept isolated from one another. It's a free roaming hotel where the emphasis is on safety, comfort and fun.

There is an overnight staff person and dogs can either sleep on their own beds or one of the many cots. As well, the dogs can get a bath and brush out at the spa before heading home. The hotel is a sleek and contemporary former industrial building circa 1938, with a ramp that makes it easier for elderly dogs to get in and out. Owners Barrie and Karen Balshaw used to operate a regular doggy daycare but soon discovered the demand for overnight stays.

"We used to overnight dogs at our home and it was crazy, because we're not set up for it," says Barrie. "And we had two dogs ourselves, and it was very difficult. We knew in the back of our minds if we found the right location we would do it right."

They decided that a hotel was a better option for their clientele than the usual kennel or dog shelter. After a stay at the Rex, customers often say their dogs are a little disappointed to be going home. Barrie estimates that around 90 per cent of his clientele are regulars.

"I want to keep it more fun for the dogs so it's not a stressful environment," says Barrie. "It's different from any other hotels I've ever seen. Most dog hotels, they are in their suites for 22 hours out of the day, and they get let out for two one or two-hour periods so it's more like a kennel. Ours is more free range - they can go out whenever they like and they have a computerized water park where they can play with water that shoots out of the air in 25-second sequences. It plays with their minds, too. It's fun."

This isn't just a Canadian or American trend, either. Mexican pet owners are also in on the luxury pet hotel act. Check out Cocoyoc Pet Hotel, where dogs scamper around a luxury hacienda with a view of the gardens: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqwLRyJ3uEw>

Nice. The only drawback is that pet owners might no longer be able to afford to scamper around a hacienda themselves.